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## VITALIZING THE TEACHING OF SPANISH

In considering the problem of vitalizing any subject, we must view the world from three points of view: first, the universe *per se*; secondly, the learner's consciousness; and, thirdly, the social expression—language. The purpose of education is to harmonize these three phases; and as far as they are unified, just so far is learning vitalized.

Language, then, becomes of paramount importance as the common denominator for the other two elements. Language is multi-form, as the world in which we live, being an organic complex of races and nations, is diversified. Plainly, a cosmopolitan view and understanding of the world would entail impossible attainments in linguistic accomplishment. The language problem resolves itself into these two parts: (1) What languages shall I learn? and (2) How may I learn them most effectively with a reasonable expenditure of time and effort?

It is generally admitted that the teaching of modern foreign languages in the United States is weak. The charge is made—and fairly made—that college graduates who have studied four or six years of French or German cannot carry on a simple conversation with ease and grace. The excuse is made that we are three thousand miles from a foreign language frontier (Mexico excepted); or that our universities, following the lead of Harvard, taught Latin and Greek instead of the modern languages. These considerations, however, are excuses and not reasons. The results have been unsatisfactory because the kind of teaching has been wrong. And now the post-bellum days of reconstruction are exposing every institution and every method to the most drastic examination. A weeding-out process is going on in every department of activity, with the result that what is wasteful or worthless must go, and what is disproportionate must be adjusted. If any foreign language is to remain in our curricula, it must be of value to Americans, and its study must show results commensurate with its cost in time, effort, and public money.

Looking forward to the needs of the generation now receiving its training, one cannot fail to see that Spanish is worthy of a place in the curriculum of the American school, for three reasons. First,

our immediate problem of Americanizing the foreigner within our borders requires that we study the language of a considerable portion of the population in our southwest. Thirty per cent, for instance, of the state of New Mexico is Anglo-Saxon; and on this minority rests the responsibility of assimilating the other seventy per cent. The very first requisite in this process is power to use the language. Pride in that language is an inherent social trait in those whose native language it is, no matter where they may be found; and experience proves that speech in their idiom is the surest and quickest way to "reach" the Spanish-American.

Secondly, some settlement of the Mexican situation is due upon the inauguration of the "Program of the World's Peace." Mexico is a vast empire on our frontier, scarcely more ready than Russia to govern herself. She has a population that is eighty-seven per cent illiterate. She has suffered under a series of presidents that were without a vision. She operates under an archaic constitution. Finally, she manifested a spirit of friendliness toward Germany too frequently at a time when Germany and the United States were at war. It will be no easy task to protect Mexico against herself and to help her in a way consistent with the national and world purposes to which we have subscribed at the Peace Conference. The problem cannot be solved by a secretary and a couple of clerks; nor is it sufficient for us to have a secondhand knowledge out of obsolete geographies. We must know with whom we deal; and the only way to know a people is through the medium of language.

Thirdly, in view of the trend of trade since the signing of the armistice, we shall have to meet South America more than half way in the Pan-American union. "*Fas est doceri et ab hoste*," and it was by thoroughly studying South America and cultivating its people in *their* way, not in the European way, that Germany surpassed her competitors in financial and industrial lines in the South American republics; and these hold as immediate and national motives to justify the study even against the superior literary claims of other languages.

In sections of the southwest, local reasons are strong, though of course they should always have a secondary consideration. Teaching, politics, the press, and trade are lines of demand that cannot be entirely ignored.

Granted that Spanish must be taught, how can its teaching be

vitalized? That is, how can Spanish be made to touch the pupil's life at many points, after graduation as well as before, and the whole process accomplished with the least expenditure of time, money, and effort?

Let us consider the so-called methods already employed. The universities have used the grammatical method, taken over from the pursuit of Latin as taught in the Middle Ages. This has failed in all phases of developing language power except the critical study of the classics. It is the least appropriate way to study Spanish, because here the classics are a secondary aim, except in advanced courses. The reaction against this extreme is the method variously denominated as "natural," "direct," or "Pestalozzi." This produces results in the first stages of learning the language, but ceases to be of value after a vocabulary of fifteen hundred words has been acquired. The Berlitz method has been successful only when used by teachers whose personality supplied the real "method," broadly speaking, and has failed when consciously learned and applied. The teachers who have succeeded with it have, perhaps unwittingly, but nevertheless truly, used a great deal more than Berlitz prescribes. Individual study with the aid of a phonograph, commercially designated as one method or another, has failed, because the very persons who require mechanical records in the absence of a teacher, have not had sufficient opportunity to learn from a good teacher *how to study*. Thus, the very situation which drives them to the talking machine makes its use a failure.

In order to energize the teaching of Spanish and eliminate waste, we must consider (1) the pupil as he actually is and behaves; (2) what the teaching resources are, both in the school machinery and the teacher, and (3) what the subject has to do with the extramural world. The immediate aim is to organize these three elements for happy, unwasteful pursuit of the subject. The ultimate aim is to give the pupil such power as will function broadly and well in his life as a member of society and citizen of the world. (The individual needs of the pupil are subordinated to his social needs in formulating the aim of a language course, on account of the essentially social character of language itself.)

The first consideration is the pupil himself. How can the powers that he has best meet the requirements of a second spoken-written-comprehended language? First, he should learn pronunciation between the ages of nine and fourteen years, while he enjoys

exercising his powers and before he reaches the self-consciousness of adolescence. This period is long enough to start three languages with an interval of two years between each group of two. Secondly, he should acquire a vocabulary of considerable size while he enjoys memorizing. Thirdly, he should have ample opportunity to become familiar with the *spoken* language and the *heard* language before the age of fourteen, for this reason: after he is fourteen, he spends much time reading books through his eyes, and thus develops what has been called "eye-mindedness," or rich visual imagery. If he does not achieve the auditory imagery of comprehending spoken Spanish, and the motor imagery of his own Spanish speaking *before* the period of intensive book study, he will probably be confined to the translation method. This is why advanced students continue with a halting, unidiomatic manner of speech.

Not only in determining the time for phases of language study, but also in seeking the best manner of presenting a new tongue, we turn to the learner's mind movement for a guide. The differentiation of the language consciousness proceeds along four lines: description of things in space; account of processes in time; exposition of principles in "behavior"; and pure reasoning. The first two are closely related, and this fact alone is a guide to the language teacher. It is easiest for the attention to focalize on a thing in space. That is why we should teach vocabulary first by names of things in space, as a child learns his first words. Likewise, the characteristic thing about action is that it happens in *time*, or is a time change. That is why action words are fundamental, and should be taught early in the subject. The relationships in language, in the early stages of learning it, are such as can be relegated to the two basic, subjective aspects, time and space. These conceptions are chiefly intuitive, and are not dependent on subsequent abstract processes of reasoning. This is why we should teach parts of speech (or parts of sentence, to be more accurate) *early*, notwithstanding the fashion of contemporary grammarians to decry so-called formal syntax. These relationships of object and act, being fundamental, can be easily articulated with the simple experience of a child of ten or twelve years.

The translation from one language to another, however, is a process of exposition and argumentation. Formal translation is a highly analytical and logical process; composition (or translation from the known to the unknown language) is a highly synthetical

process. These two activities together, if taught in a field of students' interest, i. e., with "motivated" subject matter, are the best stimuli—or at least among the best—in a curriculum for developing what William James calls sagacity. This is the aspect of linguistic study which, being misinterpreted, was stigmatized as "formal discipline"; but, being rightly understood, is an ideal manifestation of the educative process. . . . The pupil's mind naturally seeks out relationships; it moves from part to part, and from part to whole. Therefore, in mere translation, the order should be to seek the subject and predicate at a glance. The other ideas in a sentence are, generally speaking, intended either to qualify the subject or to condition its action. The consciousness thus fastens upon the whole as a unit, and likewise moves from the diverse parts to that whole. Practice in this procedure is the only way, in the end, to gain power in the performance of translating. Consciousness behaves in this way: it fastens on things and it moves between things. It is static and dynamic. If it ceases to be the one or the other, the result is insanity. Dr. Harper's so-called inductive method of teaching a language is not a method at all, because it fails to take into account this dual aspect of consciousness, and tries to hold ideas according to the order of words on a printed page, instead of according to the inter-relations among the ideas which those words call up; then to work out an orderly mosaic from a collection of little pieces. The result is a crazy-quilt instead of an orderly design. Like a crazy-quilt, it "works," but it has no significance, no harmony, no meaning; and it does not lead to any further power than making another crazy-quilt. Let the teacher thoroughly comprehend the behavior of the pupil's consciousness in these four particulars, and he can better harmonize the pupil's inner life and the world without, by helping him to a power over the instruments of intercourse between mind and mind.

It is the business of the school to make it easier and more certain for the pupil to get educated, than it would be for him to get educated without a school by haphazard contact with the world. This does not mean that he receives no education outside of the classroom. Rather, the classroom and school life enable him to make more intelligent use of the world in educating himself. The teacher is a highly useful and presumably intelligent item in the school's equipment. The teacher's personality is the chief asset (or liability) of the school. A pupil may be well educated by a

great teacher and no school system; to wit, Socrates and Jesus. But a great system without great personalities will not educate. Under the conditions of modern democracy, however, a big system is fundamental; it rests on the instinct of self-preservation. Thus it is that the resources for teaching Spanish are of two kinds: immaterial and material. Of the immaterial, we have considered the nature of the learner; let us now observe the requirements of the educator.

No teaching of Spanish or of anything else can be vitalized if the teacher is not enthusiastic about the subject. A teacher ought to feel that his work of teaching the language is an art, and he should take something of the artist's joy in his work. That attitude is more important than apocope and tense and diminutives. His culture should be such that the language as he uses it before his students is an expression of something worth expressing. That is the only way to make the students will to express themselves, directly in Spanish, or indirectly in their whole reaction to the course. Further, he should know other languages, preferably Latin and Greek, for the sake of a comprehension of Spanish itself; and, ideally, another modern tongue for the sake of a knowing, sympathetic attitude toward the pupils who are learning one. My personal stock of patience and my desire to follow my students in their mental processes are a direct result of my own struggle with a difficult Indian dialect.

Another immaterial resource of the school is public opinion, evinced by the faculty in a system of marks and credits, and by the students in recognition of their fellows' reputations. This is not a sufficient aim in itself, and yet it is a factor which is characteristic of group-study and should not be wasted as a factor in motivation.

As to material resources for teaching Spanish, the ideal asset is a colony of Spanish-speaking people. Students should talk with people who cannot speak English, and the conversation should be real. They should "mean" it. A fine example is a house-to-house canvass in the cause of Red Cross subscriptions or the sale of tickets to a school play or concert. Another good point of contact occurs in reporting a political speech or sermon (delivered in Spanish) for a *real* news story in the local paper. This has the advantage of being checked by readers, and is an example of perfect motivation. Further, things in themselves are stimulating.

Students enjoy handling South American coins and newspapers. Also, they respond to real work in composition, such as writing a Spanish advertisement for a local dealer, or corresponding with students in a Central American missionary school, receiving real letters with real stamps on the envelopes. Nowhere else is it so easy and so wise as in a language class to end that academic detachment from the living world, which has literally driven boys from the high school as soon as a birthday releases them from an observance of the compulsory attendance law.

The material used in the classroom should be as varied as are the uses of language in life. If the teacher takes this view, much wasteful effort to inculcate a university attitude in a high-school student will be spared; the Spanish classics will find their due place—as pieces of dignified literature which should be read carefully and known familiarly, as one reads and knows the classics in English; but not the warp and woof of a course compounded to meet an artificially created demand. This principle admits the use of plays, games, and singing, and the discussion of current events, even “small talk,” debates, club usages, newspapers, and magazines from South America. These are the uses we make of language, and these are the instruments of linguistic intercourse; this is what language means in daily living. Therefore, the use of these things and of language to these ends is the nucleus of “vitalizing” the teaching of Spanish.

Finally, if the student is admitted to a share in the conception of Spanish not only as an asset to Americans for the reasons stated above, but also as a racial achievement, developed through nearly two thousand years of persistent national integrity, he will be further motivated by this consciousness of ultimate, cultural aim.

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